

Message Text

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ACTION ITF-05

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FM AMEMBASSY VALLETTA

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 6146

INFO USMISSION USUN

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C O N F I D E N T I A L VALLETTA 0489

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: AEMG, MT

SUBJECT: RESETTLEMENT OF VIETNAMESE REFUGEES

FOR AMBASSADOR L. DEAN BROWN FROM AMBASSADOR

REF: STATE 097854

1. IN ABSENCE OF PRIME MINISTER MINTOFF AND FOREIGN SECRETARY ABELA, WHO HAVE NOT YET RETURNED FROM COMMONWEALTH MEETING IN JAMAICA, I MADE ORAL DEMARCHE REQUESTED REFTEL ON MAY 7 TO AMBASSADOR JOSEPH ATTARD KINGSWELL, WHO HAS JUST RETURNED FROM ABROAD AND WHO IS SENIOR OFFICIAL PRESENT IN MINISTRY OF FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS. ATTARD KINGSWELL IS ALSO MALTESE AMBASSADOR TO UN AND US AS WELL AS PRINCIPAL FOREIGN AFFAIRS ADVISOR TO MINTOFF. IN MAKING DEMARCHE, I DREW EXTENSIVELY ON REFTEL, EMPHASIZING POINT THAT WHILE WE RECOGNIZE SIZE OF MALTA MIGHT NOT PERMIT LARGE NUMBER OF REFUGEES TO BE ACCEPTED, EVEN SMALL NUMBER WOULD BE WELCOME AND HELP ALLEVIATE THE PROBLEM.

2. AMBASSADOR ATTARD KINGSWELL EXPRESSED GREAT SYMPATHY
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FOR THE PLIGHT OF THESE REFUGEES AND PRAISED USG EFFORTS

TO RESETTLE THEM. IN CASE OF MALTA, HOWEVER, ATTARD KINGSWELL SAID THAT SEVERELY LIMITED ABSORPTIVE CAPACITY OF THIS TINY ISLAND AND POPULATION OF JUST OVER 300,000 WOULD PREVENT GOM FROM ACCEPTING REFUGEES FOR PERMANENT SETTLEMENT. HE NOTED THAT MALTA ALSO FACES INCREASINGLY SERIOUS UNEMPLOYMENT PROBLEM AMONG ITS OWN PEOPLE AND IS STILL HAVING TO RESORT TO EMIGRATION TO HELP ALLEVIATE ITS OWN POPULATION PRESSURES. HOWEVER SYMPATHETIC MALTESE PEOPLE WERE TO PLIGHT OF REFUGEES, THEREFORE, HE DID NOT THINK THAT GOM WOULD BE ABLE TO ACCEPT ANY FOR PERMANENT SETTLEMENT.

3. ATTARD KINGSWELL HELD OUT SOME SLIGHT HOPE FOR TEMPORARY RPT TEMPORARY ACCOMMODATION OF HANDFUL OF REFUGEES IF THEY HELD PROFESSIONAL OR OTHER SKILLED QUALIFICATIONS WHICH HAPPEN TO BE IN SHORT SUPPLY AT PRESENT TIME IN MALTA. HE RECALLED THAT GOM HAD DONE SAME THING IN 1972 AT TIME OF MASS EXODUS OF ASIANS FROM UGANDA. HE STRESSED, HOWEVER, THAT THIS MIGHT BE POSSIBLE ONLY ON STRICTLY TEMPORARY BASIS WITH CLEAR UNDERSTANDING THAT REFUGEES WOULD ULTIMATELY HAVE TO MOVE ON TO ANOTHER COUNTRY FOR PERMANENT SETTLEMENT.

4. COMMENT: ABSORPTIVE CAPACITY OF THIS TINY ISLAND IS INDEED LIMITED, AND IN LIGHT OF ATTARD KINGSWELL'S COMMENTS I DO NOT BELIEVE IT WOULD BE REALISTIC TO EXPECT ANY AFFIRMATIVE ACTION BY MALTA. ON ASSUMPTION THAT TEMPORARY ACCOMMODATION WOULD NOT MEET THE PROBLEM, I WILL NOT PURSUE POINT IN PARA 3 ABOVE UNLESS INSTRUCTED TO DO SO. SMITH

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